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Sound-Based Creativity in the Community

This document provides an outline for 3 workshops that can be used in community settings for introducing participants to sound-based creativity. They are each designed as 1-hour workshops, but it is intended that they should be adaptable for different circumstances. Therefore, exercises can be reduced, extended or used as stand alone activities depending on the time available.

Workshop 1 – Listening Training

Tags: #Listening #Sound-based music #Soundwalk #Soundscape #Soundscape composition #Hildegard Westerkamp #Acoustic ecology #Sound parameters

The first session will focus on listening. In this workshop participants will:

- Begin to open their ears to the sounds around them through simple listening exercises.
- Engage in focused listening to environmental sounds by participating in a soundwalk in the local area.
- Discuss and reflect on the sounds encountered during the walk and their different characteristics.
- Be introduced to the concept of making music using sounds.

- Understand how listening practice can be a source of inspiration for creating sound-based music.

Short introduction – concerning listening. This will introduce the participants to the workshops and the idea of learning to listen attentively.

Gong listening

Take a resonant instrument that has a long decay (a gong, suspended cymbal, triangle). Ask the group to close their eyes and listen to how long the sound lasts when played and, when they hear the sound stop, to open their eyes and indicate they can't hear it anymore.

Ask the group: Is it clear when the gong sound ends?

Do this several times now asking the group to remember what other sounds they heard just before they opened their eyes.

After listening, ask for contributions in order to collaboratively produce an overall list of all the sounds heard.

Soundwalk

A soundwalk is where a group (or a single person) walk quietly through a chosen area listening closely to the sounds around them. This can be conducted through and around the workshop location. The soundwalk leader will record the soundwalk (there might be interesting sounds that can be played back to the group or used later in creative work) and it should last approximately 10 minutes. Beforehand participants will be given a soundwalk instruction sheet (see next page). This facilitates a more focused listening than the previous exercises and it encourages participants to think about sound characteristics (such as pitch, duration and volume).

Soundwalk



What do you hear?

Lead your ears away from these sounds and listen beyond into the distance

What else do you hear?

What else?

What else?

*Which sounds are the **LOUDEST**?*

Which are the quietest?

Which sounds are short?

Which sounds are long?

Are they **HIGH** or **LOW** in pitch?

Which sounds would you keep? 😊

Which sounds would you scrap? ☹️

Discussion

There will be a discussion immediately after the soundwalk to give an opportunity for the participants to discuss what was heard and share their feelings about the experience.

This is also an opportunity to explain that you can listen to the sounds for their music qualities (such as pitch or duration) or for their context (what is the source of the sound).

To finish – play excerpt of ‘Cricket Voice’ by Hildegard Westerkamp.

Before playing –

- *Explain that some composers go on soundwalks in particular places to get inspiration for making sound-based music, which is music that uses sounds rather than notes.*
- *Also encourage them to listen to it both in a musical and contextual way.*
- *Don’t tell them the title of the piece and ask the group if they can tell what sounds Westerkamp used for the piece.*
- *Does the piece make them think of a particular environment? (It was recorded in a desert in Mexico)*
- *Can they hear different pitches and rhythms? (Westerkamp has made rhythms out of the cricket sounds and changed their pitch).*

Workshop 2 – Recording Treasure Hunt

Tags: #Recording #Microphones #Digital recorders #Listening #Sound type #Sound source #Recording techniques #Composition

This session focuses on collecting sounds, thinking about categories and starting to compose with them.

In this workshop participants will:

- Discover strategies for finding and recording interesting sounds
- Understand some of the ways in which these can be organised
- Develop the listening skills from the first workshop.

Introduction

Talk about what sounds they heard from the listening exercise in session 1.

1. Explain that in this session they will be collecting sounds to use in their compositions.

Play 'Everything but the Kitchen sink' by Duncan Chapman.

Ask what types of sounds did Duncan use in this composition? Highlight the quieter/slower section where the pan sounds have been transformed into resonant tones.

Then explain that they will be recording sounds to use in their compositions and that they need to first think about what types of sounds to collect.

Treasure hunt

One way of organising the collecting of sounds is to have a sonic treasure hunt. This involves creating different kinds of lists of sounds to find. The kind of list you create with your group will depend on future creative activities you might plan to do with the sounds.



The participants could be asked to collect sounds in relation to groups of 'things' or 'actions', for example:

- A sound made by a machine
- A sound made by travelling from inside to outside
- A sound made by a non-human animal
- A sound made by someone you know
- A sound made by dropping something
- A sound made by food
- A sound made by a musical instrument
- A sound that makes you think of the sea
- A sound made by the weather
- A hidden sound that no one has heard before
- A quiet sound
- A loud sound
- A sound which repeats
- A sound which is randomly changing
- A sound that gets louder
- A sound that gets quieter
- A short sound
- A long sound
- A continuous sound
- A high sound
- A low sound

It's a good idea to try and keep the list as 'open' as possible, "a sound made by a machine" is often going to result in a more interesting and diverse range of sounds than "the sound of a car".

Demonstrate how to use recording device

Before dividing the participants into groups, demonstrate how the recording device works and make a recording of the whole group saying a word (e.g. 'listen) that you then play back to them.

Recording

1. Divide the participants into groups of 4
2. Equip each group with a recording device, pair of headphones, recording log sheet and something to write with.
3. Starting inside make some test recordings so that each group are clear about how their machine works and how to play back the sound that they have just recorded.
4. After making tests recordings ask each group to make a list of the types of sounds (taken from the list made by the whole group, which they can add to) they want to collect BEFORE going on their recording trip.

Also ask:

Q: Are the participants going to record the sounds of a place without intervention in making the sounds?

OR

Q: Are they going to record sounds of what they do with what they find i.e. sounds that they are actively playing?

An effective strategy is to start with listening to the sounds that are in the environment already (maybe using the gong listening as a way of focussing attention?). After this gradually introduce the idea of the participants playing things e.g. if you find yourself by a pond on a gravel path then it would be daft NOT to drop a few stones in or shuffle your feet etc

5. Ask each group to make a log of the sounds they record AS they do it (this is the part that people often neglect but it's important to try and have a written record of the sequence of the recorded sounds so that they will be easily able to find them when they come to use them in composition).

6. Get the participants to take turns to use the recording device and make the recording log.

7. After making test recordings for a short time give the groups a clear time limit and ideas for where they can go to make recordings in a wider area.

Reflection

When all the groups have collected the sounds you might want to have a sharing of what has been collected before moving on to composing with them.

A way of doing this is to:

1: Ask each group to choose their favourite sound from the ones they have collected. Play these back one at a time and talk about them maybe using the questions from the Soundwalk session.

2: Ask each group to choose a sound they have recorded where it is unclear what the source is. Play these back one at a time and discuss the characteristics of the sounds (you will need to prime the group to make sure they keep the source a secret). This can be a good way of talking about the details rather than the names of sounds.

Workshop 3 – Composing

Tags: #Composition #Audio software #Audio processing #Audio editing #Musical parameters #Experimentation #Sequencing #Transformation #Loops

This session focuses on listening to the sounds recorded in workshop 2 and begin to compose pieces using those sounds. This workshop will require participants to use software in which sounds can be arranged, edited and manipulated (such as Soundplant, Compose with Sounds or Audacity – see links at the end of the document). Through participating in this workshop the participants will:

- Further develop listening and describing skills from workshops 1 & 2
- Learn to use software to edit, manipulate and transform sounds.
- Arrange the sounds into compositions.

Introduction

Play some of the sounds that were recorded in the previous session and then import these into the software. Give a basic introduction to how the software works. Demonstrate how sounds can be edited, looped and transformed.

Activity 1 – learning to use the software through experimentation

Allow the participants some time to experiment with the software and sounds for them to get used to how it works. Check that they have all managed to use the basic functions successfully and then move onto activity 2.

Activity 2 - Composing with Sounds

Explain that they now need to start to organise their sounds into compositions. To illustrate how this can be done refer to the example pieces played in previous weeks and then play:

"C'est Wizzz!!!" by Florian Sulpice

Explain that this piece was created by a school pupil in France. Ask how the piece can be described? Can the metaphor of a journey be used to describe its development? How are the materials arranged? Highlight the contrast between short dry sounds and longer sustained sounds with reverberation.

Then, provide some simple tips for composing, such as:

- Which sound or sounds will start the composition?
- How do the individual sounds start and end? Fade in or suddenly appear?
- Will some sounds repeat? Will there be certain motif sounds?
- How many sounds play at once? How could this be shown in the score?
- Contrast – this can be a useful compositional tool. For example, the contrast between long and short sounds or quiet and loud sounds, which leads onto....
- Dynamics - explain what this means. Are there any sounds that they have recorded that might help them to achieve this?
- How will the piece end?
- Create plans or scores for organising their compositions. How will the different sounds be sequenced?

Ask the participants to first listen to the sounds they have available and then start to select the sounds that they want to work with. To do this they need to think about which sounds will work well together. Encourage them to use a good balance of similar and contrasting sound types.

IF there is time at the end of the workshop share some of the work with the rest of the group.

Further listening:

A number of examples of sound-based repertoire can be found at the EARS 2 listening room:

<http://ears2.dmu.ac.uk/category/listen/listening-room/>

All the pieces created as part of the Compose with Sounds project can be found here:

<http://cws.dmu.ac.uk/EN/10>

A number of artists who specialise in field recordings release material through the Touch label, examples of this can be found here:

<http://touchradio.org.uk>

Further information on Hildegard Westerkamp compositions can be found here:

<http://www.sfu.ca/~westerka/compositions.html#comp>

A selection of Duncan Chapman sound recordings can be found here:

<http://www.duncanchapman.org/sound-of-the-week/>

Useful links

EARS 2 website - <http://ears2.dmu.ac.uk>

World forum for acoustic ecology - <http://wfae.net>

Soundplant - <https://soundplant.org>